

[A. P. Johnston Stone]

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Superior, Montana

Interview with Mr. A. P. Johnston, Superior, Montana

TOPIC: The A. P. Johnston Store.

I came to Superior in the early 1890's (1892), from Kansas, a year after my sister, Mrs. Lizzie Miles. My name was Mary McCarthy then; I was a widow with two children, Leta and Burna. I had earned our living as a teacher, especially of kindergarten, and had also been a practical nurse and a clerk. Soon after I came to Superior, A. P. Johnston got me to clerk in his store. By that time, he had moved the store from the old stone building just west of this ranch-house, and kept it in the east end of this building, in that big room we used for a livingroom when we quit the store. I keep it shut off most of the time now: it's too hard to heat.

Soon after I began clerking, Johnston talked me into marrying him, saying I was fitted for a different kind of life. He talked of his going on with the store, and keeping me and the children in a fine home in Missoula or Wallace. I was still in the dark as to the shady character of the establishment he kept in connection with the store, what with his Southern-gentlemanly front and his soft soap. Did he run a [Gandy?] house and gambling estab.?

I soon found out what his high and mighty ways meant to me. He refused to eat with the hired men employed to run this place, the packers, and transients I fed in the kitchen at that long table and insisted on a special service in the dining-room, where he ate in solitary state. He berated me for lowering my dignity by associating, and permitting my children

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to associate, with “servants.” I came back at him and said he could import finger bowls; I'd use them to throw in his face.

(Mrs. Johnston, if she could be induced to forget her reluctance to recall the old days, has a wealth of colorful material. Her younger daughter, Mrs. Grace Johnston Horskey, of Helena, Montana, has numerous documents kept by her father. His name is scattered throughout the records of Mineral County from the very early days until his death a few years ago. I give the above material from Mrs. Johnston, realizing the poverty of it, but hoping it may give an inkling into the character of Johnston. Husband and wife were an interesting example of contrasts: From the time when I first saw Johnston, in 1905, he was exceedingly thin and delicate, with fine features framed by well-kept gray hair and beard. His manner was courtly, but pleasant, covering a decided business shrewdness. Mrs. Johnston always spoke of her husband as “Mr. Johnston.” She acquired something of the lady-like manner he desired for her, which slipped in moments of anger. She says, “Is it any wonder my hard life made me pick up a cuss word here and there?” Until quite recently she was much as she must have looked when she first came to Superior: Hair built up into a high [pompadour?] over a foundation, she wore under the same hat winter and summer; in 3 winter decked with luxuriant feathers, in summer with plentiful flowers. Her buxom figure was set off by neat, old-fashioned cotton dress, covered by large, full-gathered, white apron.

The ranch-house was in use at least since the early 1890's and, though much deteriorated, shows evidence of a former attempt at grandeur. It is long and low, with porch extending across the entire north side. There are eight rooms. The east portion, which was used as a store, is extremely high-ceilinged, and its faded, papered walls are hung with many large, somewhat garish pictures. Ancient lace and velvet hangings, highly-colored dishes of a former time, deep feather beds, a plethora of sofa pillows, all urge one to slip out of the present day into a less critical age.)